

What Does Act 62 on Prekindergarten Education Mean for Families with Young Children?

This past spring, the Vermont State Legislature passed a law that recognizes the importance of prekindergarten education for children ages 3 to 5 and defines the state's commitment to ensuring young children are provided "with opportunities to reach their full growth and developmental potential." Governor Douglas signed this law which is now known as "Act 62." The Act recognizes that "a child's growth and development occur best in integrated environments" and "are best provided in locations that are convenient to families and minimize transitions for children." It further acknowledges that "the provision of early care and prekindergarten education through high quality private providers is one of the most crucial elements supporting the strengths and stability of the system serving young children."

Important Information for You to Know about Act 62:

- School districts can use public education funding for prekindergarten education (pre-K), but it is **not mandatory**. The decision of whether to offer pre-K is decided by the school board.
- Pre-K education is defined as early development and learning services provided for 6 to 10 hours per week during the school year. It is important to know that children who are 3 to 5 years old are not required to participate in pre-K; that is a decision you make as a family.
- Act 62 limits the number of prekindergarten children a school district can count in its "average daily membership" which may mean that not all 3 to 5 year old children in your town will be able to participate in a publicly funded pre-K program.
- Before a school district can start a new pre-K program or expand a current pre-K program, it must do a community needs assessment and hear from people in the community about the need for pre-k programs.
- Act 62 requires that before school districts start a new pre-K program or expand a current one, they must contract with existing qualified providers, to the extent that they have the capacity to meet the district's needs effectively and efficiently. This includes licensed centers as well as registered family child care homes.
- In order for any pre-K program to be considered "qualified" to receive public education funds (whether they are in a community child care center or home, in a Head Start program, or in a public school), the program must meet quality standards. These standards include program accreditation or STARS, and a licensed early childhood teacher (family child care providers can meet the licensed teacher standard by getting regular supervision from a licensed teacher).
- If your town provides public pre-K, as a parent you may request that your school district enter into a contract with a qualified child care center or registered family child care provider inside or outside of your district. The provider also can request that the school district enter into a contract.
- Act 62 requires the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to jointly write rules that will guide how pre-K will be implemented. These draft rules will be open for public comment early in 2008.
- This law requires all pre-K programs to provide opportunities for parent participation.

What You May Want To Do Now:

- Contact your local school district to find out if pre-K is available.
- Talk with your current child care or Head Start provider to see if she or he is interested in and/or qualified to participate in a partnership with the school district to provide pre-K education.
- Ask your Building Bright Futures (BBF) director about what's happening in your community around pre-K education. (To locate the BBF director in your area, go to the BBF website listed below.)
- Review and comment on the proposed rules during the public comment period, January 21 through February 29, 2008. The draft rules will be posted on the DOE website (www.education.state.vt.us).

For Additional Information on the following topics, go to the link that appears below the topic:

Act 62

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2008/acts/ACT062.htm>

Rules and Rule-Making Process

http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdfdoc/board/packet_07_1016/item_1.pdf

Building Bright Futures

www.buildingbrightfutures.org